



# DuSable Park tests positive for thorium

By LYDIALYLE GIBSON

Staff Writer

Two years ago this month, Bob O'Neill and Joan Pilot thought DuSable Park, a weedy nub of a peninsula jutting out just south of Navy Pier, would soon be covered with asphalt. The president of the Grant Park Advisory Council and the president of the DuSable League, respectively, O'Neill and Pilot were still reeling, in August of 2000, from the news that city officials meant to turn the long-dedicated-but-not-developed greenspace into a spot for commuters to park their cars. Along with a couple hundred others, O'Neill and Pilot protested. By September of that year, the parking lot scheme was scrapped.

Just three months later, though, another bit of news sent a shudder through the park-boosting ranks. The same radioactive thorium that for years had compelled worried environmentalists in West

Chicago and Streeterville to sink meters into the ground and cart off whole truckloads of contaminated soil had somehow made its way to DuSable Park.

After months-long negotiations between environmental officials and executives from the Oklahoma-based energy firm that inherited the neighborhood's thorium woes—plus a year or two of fervent coaxing by O'Neill and his ilk—the results are in. This May, a few guys in white suits and yellow rubber boots crawled all over DuSable Park, gathering handfuls of dirt to carry back to the lab. And what they found is something many officials at the Environmental Protection Agency expected—some contamination, but only here and there and nowhere very deep.

"There was some contamination," said Fred Micke, site coordinator for the USEPA. "But it was in the areas we thought it would be in, and it was relatively shallow. There are just a few hot spots."

"The good news is there weren't any surprises," Micke said.

Next comes the tricky part—deciding who pays to clean up DuSable Park, and deciding just what form that cleanup will take. As the landowner, the Park District could be asked to underwrite the remediation. But it's more likely that Kerr-McGee officials, who years ago bought the incandescent light company whose 1930s factory polluted Streeterville, will foot that bill. But Tuesday afternoon, Debbie Schramm, a spokesman for the energy company, said she couldn't guess whether Kerr-McGee would be liable for DuSable Park's scrubbing.

"You really have to ask the EPA about that," Schramm said. "At this point there's no decision on the cleanup. The EPA asked us to do the testing, and that's kind of the point we're at now. We're working hand-in-hand with the EPA."

Micke, too, said no decision on

how to clean DuSable Park—who would fund it—has been made. According to him, EPA officials have asked for several "clarifications" to the test results Kerr-McGee submitted earlier this month. Micke said EPA officials are still waiting for the company's response. When they get it, he said, environmental officials will release the report to the public. What happens next depends on what's in the final report, he said.

Meanwhile, insisting that time's a-wasting, O'Neill advised the formation of a Park District steering committee to get in a few early planning licks. Parks officials also ought to start calling in

funding pledges, like the \$600,000 promised by MCL Properties President Dan McLean and the \$500,000 awarded by the Ferguson Fund for DuSable Park's sculpture of its namesake, O'Neill said.

"What needs to happen now is there needs to be a steering committee, like the one put together for Ping Tom Park II," O'Neill said. "With the EPA saying 'What are the park plans?' so they can put together the cleanup, and the Park District saying we can't plan a park until it's cleaned. One thing we know, which is positive, is what the contamination is. And depending on the plan, thorium can be capped over. Or we

can do what's being done further west, which is taking out several feet of soil. That would give a clean slate."

A panel of concerned neighborhood types would help move DuSable Park closer to development, O'Neill said, if only by its resolute appearance.

"If Kerr-McGee sees the Park District has organized a steering committee of residents and officials and designers and neighbors, that sends the message that they really want it cleaned up, and that's what Kerr-McGee has responded to in West Chicago and the suburbs," O'Neill said. "It also puts pressure on the EPA to put pressure on Kerr-McGee."

## BAR LOUIE

Continued from page 1

garden wasn't too large, and we'll continue to monitor it for the neighborhood."

"The key element is—and this

cation—offered accounts of wee-hour brawls in the restaurant's parking lot. Lou Marolda said he and his wife had awak-

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